NUTRITION
AND
FOOD SUPPLIES

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INTEREST IN NUTRITION

Long before Sir George Newman (until lately the nation's Chief Medical Officer) wrote in an Annual Report that "health is a purchasable commodity," the Labour Movement had been calling attention to the fact that health was denied to large sections of the people because of their poverty. Until recently it had little support outside its own ranks.

Even in 1933 when the report—"Creating a C.3 Nation"—was discussed and adopted by the National Conference of Labour Women, the danger of widespread malnutrition was not regarded seriously, and little notice was taken by the press of the demands made at that conference for adequate maintenance for the unemployed and the feeding of school children; nor of the budgets published to show that the amounts available for food in a number of unemployed families (typical of thousands more) ranged from 1/8 to 3/1½ per head per week.

To-day Nutrition is a fashionable subject. There is widespread concern at the steadily accumulating evidence of the terrible effects of prolonged unemployment on health; but the present interest in Nutrition is partly due to the fact that one section of capitalist producers—farmers in this and other countries—are unable to find a profitable market for their produce. Inspiring calls for the "marriage of health to agriculture" may reflect concern for the farmer who cannot sell rather than for the poor who cannot buy. It is important to emphasise this because if the glut of food could be taken off the market in some other way—if, for example, the new fleets of cruisers could run on milk or the new squadrons of aeroplanes could be oiled with butter—we should undoubtedly find much less concern in certain quarters at the absence of first-class proteins and vitamins from the tables of the unemployed and underpaid workers.

DOES MALNUTRITION EXIST?

The great advance in the science of Nutrition in recent years, raises economic and political issues which the scientists hesitate to face—some of them protesting too much that it is impossible to prove a close relation between nutrition or malnutrition and poverty.

Official Complacency

The official attitude is over-complacent. It is true that for some years the Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health has contained warnings about the possible dangers to future health of prolonged unemployment. But the tendency has been to maintain that things are not so bad. For example, the last Report (published in September, 1935), after quoting extensively from the report of a special Inquiry in the County of Durham, adds the comment:—

> "The evidence in this report, evidence which is congruent with much other information available to the medical department, shows that even in the most distressed areas of the country the measures taken by public authorities and the generous efforts of individuals have so far as the usual indices of health can be trusted, largely held in check the deleterious influences of unemployment and reduced income." (page 17).

The particular inquiry to which such authority is given, was undertaken by the Ministry of Health following statements in the press by a doctor in the county that there was "a substantial and progressive deterioration of the public health."

The investigation was carried out by three doctors who spent sixteen week-days in the area, and examined over 4,700 persons—pre-school children, school children, adolescents, pregnant and nursing mothers. Had they each given eight hours on all the sixteen days to these examinations, they could have spent barely five minutes on each person! It is absurd to use a report based on such an inquiry as evidence of the health conditions of the people in any area.

The latest report (1934) of the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education records a slight increase in

the number of children returned as suffering from malnutrition, requiring treatment or observation, but states:

> "The massed return for 1934, compiled from figures submitted by 316 Education Authorities, shows that the conditions of nutrition of school children throughout England and Wales remains practically stationary and shows no general deterioration."

Lack of Objective Standard

The value of official statistics relating to the nutrition of school children must be questioned. In the first place there is no generally accepted standard for assessing malnutrition, and the Chief Medical Officer has to collate observations which represent the personal views and judgment of a large number of local Medical Officers.

Discrepancies in the standards adopted are revealed by comparisons of figures from various areas: a point which is the subject of frequent comment.

> "In England, the diagnosis of malnutrition in schools is based on clinical examination, and the subjective element which enters into the assessment is illustrated by the following: Bootle (which is for all practical purposes an integral part of greater Liverpool) returns a malnutrition rate twelve times as high as Liverpool itself; Leeds and Wigan, containing very similar industrial populations, return rates of 31 and 9 per 1,000 respectively; the relatively prosperous borough of Twickenham returns a rate of 10 per 1,000." (Report on "Nutrition and Public Health," League of Nations, June, 1935).

Further, in the absence of a common standard, there is a danger that where the average standard of health is low, the **average** will be regarded as the **normal,** with the result that a lower percentage of malnutrition is reported than would be the case if a high standard were adopted.

Difficulty of Early Detection

Finally, the difficulty of detecting any but the more obvious signs of malnutrition, particularly in a brief routine examination, must be emphasised. Height and weight tests may reveal no departure from the normal, until long after the damage has set in.

> "The effects of malnutrition due to poverty may only become apparent after a long interval; a child whose diet contains too high a proportion of cheap carbo-hydrates may retain a

'normal' weight for a fairly long time, even though a state of anaemia and debility has already set in." (Report on "Nutrition and Public Health," League of Nations, June, 1935).

Evidence of Malnutrition

The Ministry of Health and the Board of Education give too much weight to the more optimistic local reports which state there is little or no evidence of malnutrition, and they fail to reflect the growing dissatisfaction with the statistical results of routine examinations, nor do they emphasise sufficiently the views of those medical officers who produce evidence of increasing malnutrition.

There is no space to quote from Reports, but many Medical Officers report an increase in malnutrition among mothers and school children; and a number have definitely associated maternal deaths and ill-health, an increase of rickets and tuberculosis, and the prevalence of anaemia, with prolonged poverty. Other significant statements which frequently occur are that the provision of school meals has prevented serious deterioration of the children's health; and that the health of the children has been fairly well maintained in spite of poverty, **but only at the expense of the mothers.**

FOOD AND HEALTH

While it would be most desirable to have some generally accepted standard for assessing nutrition, it would be still more useful from the point of view of improving the nation's health, if the public medical services would concentrate on finding out the extent of **underfeeding** among those who come under their notice.

Importance of Right Diet

It is argued by those who do not care to hear words like "underfeeding," that poverty and inadequate diet are not the only causes of malnutrition. We can agree that there are factors not necessarily associated with poverty —e.g., overwork, mental anxiety or previous disease— which affect nutrition; and also that malnutrition may be caused by over-feeding as well as by under-feeding! But most of the "other causes than poverty" which are

frequently cited as the reason for malnutrition, are really symptoms of poverty, bad housing, overcrowding, lack of rest and sleep, lack of fresh air, worry, etc.

The significant fact, however, is that **a proper diet is the most important factor in Nutrition, and the want of it the most important cause of Malnutrition.**

> "Nutrition was the process, or series of co-ordinated processes, whereby the nourishment of the body was effected, and the structural integrity and functional efficiency of every cell maintained. . . .
>
> Nutrition was affected adversely by a number of factors such as imperfect oxygenation, insufficient rest and want of sleep, overwork and fatigue, but by far the most important factor was food of improper constitution." (Sir Robert McCarrison on "Nutrition and National Health," British Medical Journal, 29/2/36).

Essentials of a Right Diet

We have advanced from the time when it was thought enough merely to have sufficient food regularly to satisfy hunger. We know more about why we require food and the importance of quality as well as quantity.

Food is required as **fuel** for the body, to keep it warm, and supply it with energy.

Food is required as **building material,** for the proper construction of the body before birth, throughout childhood and the period of growth, and for the upkeep of the body—tissue repair, etc.

Food is required to **protect** the body against disease and to ensure its healthy functioning.

A right diet is one which has adequate heat and energy value (calories) and which contains a sufficient supply of body-building and protective material. If heat and energy were all we had to think of, a diet of fairly cheap foods would be enough, but the body-building and protective foods require a more varied and expensive dietary.

Apart from oxygen and water all food is made up of **fats** and **carbohydrates,** which are fuel materials; **proteins,** which are body-building material (classified as animal or first-class protein and vegetable or second-class protein);

and **mineral salts** and **vitamins,** which keep our bodies in good order and protect us from disease.

Without using scientific terms, a healthy diet may be described as an abundant and varied diet of quite ordinary foodstuffs—the kind of diet the housewife tries to provide **when she can afford it.** She knows that her family require a fair amount of "filling" things—bread, potatoes, cereals, which satisfy hunger, and which, along with fats, are the sources of warmth and energy: that they need a reasonable quantity of body-building food like milk, cheese, eggs, fish and meat. She also knows that fresh natural foods should have an important place in the diet—e.g., milk, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables and fat fish, in addition to other uses they may have, contain the vitamins which are so essential for health and growth; green vegetables and eggs supply iron which is necessary to make blood; milk and eggs provide calcium and phosphorous, which are needed to build teeth and bones.

Medical investigation has shown very clearly that there is a close connection between diet and the proper development of bones, teeth and tissue, and the proper functioning of the body; that the right diet is a means of preventing rickets, anaemia and other "deficiency" diseases; that a right diet is all-important for expectant and nursing mothers, infants and children, if the health of the adult is to be sound. It has also been shown that where a proper diet is lacking, it is impossible to derive advantage from other factors—e.g., improved housing—which normally make for better health.

MINIMUM versus "OPTIMUM" STANDARDS

While there is general agreement among the experts as to what foods are essential and why, and what is likely to happen to us if we have to go without them, they approach the problem of diet from different angles. Some of the Nutrition inquirers attempt to discover the **minimum diet** on which health can be maintained—the diet below which it would be dangerous to fall—(e.g., The Report of the British Medical Association Committee on

Nutrition, and the Report on "Criticism and Improvement of Diets," published by the Ministry of Health). Others aim at the **optimum diet**—the diet which will enable us to maintain an ideal standard of nutrition, defined by Sir John Orr as "a state of well-being such that no improvement can be effected by a change in the diet."

Class Distinction in Health?

We believe that we should be concerned not with the **minimum** diet but with the **best** (optimum); or to put it another way, the only diet which we can regard as satisfactory, in the light of existing knowledge of nutrition, is one that will enable every member of the community to attain a standard of health and growth equal to that enjoyed by the healthiest sections of the community. To aim at a lower general standard is to admit the necessity of class distinction in health.

Can We Raise Health Level Above "Minimum"?

Certain nutrition experiments in recent years have shown the possibility of raising the level of nutrition beyond the standard attainable on a minimum diet. The large-scale experiment in 1930 among Lanarkshire school children to test the value of milk, produced striking results. 20,000 children were under review, 10,000 receiving a ration of $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of milk per day, the others receiving no ration. At the end of four months, the children receiving milk showed a greater rate of growth and a marked improvement in health. The preface to the report says:

> "The results . . . demonstrate that the addition of milk to the diet of children has a striking effect in improving physique, and general health, and increasing mental alertness. They suggest also that, apart from its own food value, milk enables the other constituents of the ordinary diet to be fully utilised as growth factors."

Both groups of children were mixed—well nourished as well as poorly nourished children being included. But the marked improvement in the milk-ration children was not confined to those who had been ill-nourished.

In 1926 an experiment was carried out by Dr. Corry Mann among schoolboys at an industrial school near London, where all the boys were on the same "basic" diet, which was considered an adequate one. They were divided into groups, one group receiving only the "basic" diet, the other receiving an additional ration of food. The most striking comparison at the end of one year was between the "basic" group and the "milk-ration" group.

	Gain in weight.	Gain in height.
Basic Group ...	3.85-lbs. ...	1.84-ins.
Milk Group ...	6.98-lbs. ...	2.63-ins.

Dr. Corry Mann's report points out:

> "Apart from the marked gain in weight and height . . . there is also a general improvement in their physical condition. They lose the marked tendency to chilblains. . . . In addition they become far more high spirited and irrespressible being often in trouble on that account, and though it is not possible to measure this change in their mentality by statistical methods yet the change was unmistakable."

An investigation into the Health and Nutrition of children in Newcastle-upon-Tyne revealed the wide gap in health between poor children and well-to-do children. A group of 125 working-class children (103 of them children of unemployed fathers) was compared with 124 children belonging to the professional classes.

	Poor Children Per cent.	Well-to-do Children Per cent.
Below normal weight ...	55 ...	13
Above normal weight ...	11 ...	48
Below normal height ...	47 ...	5
Above normal height ...	2 ...	11
Anaemic	23 ...	0

Sir Robert McCarrison, in a recent lecture,

> "described comparative studies of rats to demonstrate the freedom of well-fed animals from disease and the proneness to disease of animals fed on such a diet as was commonly used by the poorer classes in England. . . . Rats fed on this sort of diet showed stunted growth and other signs of poor nutrition. They were susceptible to two chief classes of ailments—namely, pulmonary and gastro-intestinal." (British Medical Journal, 29/2/36).

It is not unreasonable to suggest that this diet is producing similar results on the families who are compelled to live on it!

The chief objection to the conception of a **minimum** diet is the danger of its being accepted as a standard; and as there are variations between the needs of individuals there would always be a number for whom the minimum is inadequate. It is safer, therefore, to aim at the "optimum" diet. But a study of some of the minimum standards suggested from time to time is of value in helping to estimate the extent of underfeeding.

COST OF A RIGHT DIET

Various social and medical investigators have put the **minimum** cost of a diet for an adult man at sums varying from 5/- to 6/8 per week.

The British Medical Association Committee on Nutrition (1933) carefully estimated the minimum food requirements for individuals and families. A diet was worked out in detail. The cost for an adult man was estimated at 5/10, and for a family of husband, wife and three children (of 12, 10 and 6) at 22/6½ per week.

The B.M.A. did not claim that this was an ideal diet, but merely a minimum diet bought at the cheapest prices. An enquiry through the Labour Women's Advisory Councils in February, 1934, showed that the 22/6½ specimen family diet of the B.M.A. could not then be bought at that price, the actual cost over 22 areas ranging from 23/6 to 29/5. Since then prices of a number of foodstuffs have risen and the cost of the diet to-day is greater.*

The report published by the Ministry of Health on "The Criticism and Improvement of Diets," while adopting a lower calories standard than the British Medical Association, gave advice about body-building and protective foods, which, if followed, would require a more varied, nutritious and expensive diet than that suggested by the British Medical Association.

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* An enquiry in July, 1936, shows that the cost of the B.M.A. specimen family diet varies in nineteen districts from 26/11 to 30/9¾.

The Ministry of Health in 1932 published a report on Diet in Poor Law Children's Homes, which considered the question of a properly balanced diet with a careful eye to economy. The conclusion was that in an institution for 200 children, the weekly cost per head per week, **for food alone,** would be about 4/6½, **if all provisions were bought at contract prices.**

Sir John Orr, who is a recognised authority on Nutrition, has stated in his recent book "Food, Health and Income," that a diet sufficient to maintain the fullest health can only be assured where there is an expenditure of 10/- per head per week on food.

EXPENDITURE ON FOOD

How do these various estimates of the cost of a minimum diet, and Sir John Orr's estimate for the "Optimum," compare with the actual amounts which families can spend on food.

Sir John Orr argues that half the population are living below his ideal standard.

There are, he says, 4½ million people who can spend no more than 4/- a week upon food. Their diet is deficient in every constituent.

There are 9 millions who spend no more than 6/- per week. Their diet is adequate in fuel foods and in tissue forming foods, but deficient in protective foods.

There are 9 millions who spend no more than 8/- per week. Their diet is deficient in certain protective elements.

The fourth group of 9 millions who spend 10/- per week, have an almost completely adequate diet.

In two higher groups of 9 millions and 4½ millions respectively—spending 12/- and 14/- per week—there is a surplus of the various constituents.

These figures have provoked a good deal of interest and controversy and have been attacked by those who prefer the complacency of the Ministry of Health Reports. Our view is that Sir John Orr's figures do not exaggerate the evil of underfeeding: that in certain respects they even underestimate it.

The Average and the Actual

There is a danger in applying an average to millions of people, of assuming that the average represents the normal actual conditions of the majority. But every housewife must spend her own income, not an abstract average. If three neighbours have incomes of £5, £2 10s. and £1 10s. respectively, there are two of them who will not find comfort in the statement that the "average" income of the three is £3 a week.

Among the 4½ million whose expenditure on food is estimated as "averaging" 4/- per head per week, **there are tens of thousands who have a good deal less to spend on food.**

LABOUR WOMEN'S INQUIRY

The Women's Sections of the Labour Party began in February of this year an inquiry **to ascertain how much or how little of the chief body-building and protective foods can be bought by working-class housewives at different income ranges.**

An analysis of the first 1,000 budgets received appears as an appendix to this pamphlet. These budgets reveal that many unemployed families have no more than from 2/- to 3/6 per head per week for food: that families on low wages very often are on as low a standard as the unemployed: and that there is a close relation between the consumption of the more essential foods and income.

As the amount per person available for food decreases, the purchase of milk, butter, eggs, fresh fruit

and vegetables, cheese, fish and meat decreases, until in the lowest ranges of income they are eliminated altogether except for occasional cheap scraps of meat, a bit of the cheaper cheese and perhaps half a pint of milk on Sunday. At the same time there is an increase in the amount of bread and potatoes purchased.

Good Nutrition Impossible for Poor

Once again we have the most conclusive evidence that in spite of heroic efforts on the part of mothers, many families are forced down to a bread, potato and margarine diet, and that too often that diet is shared by the mother during pregnancy with little or no additional nourishment.

Letters which have been sent along with the forms, many of them very detailed and illuminating, express over and over again the bitterness and anxiety of mothers who realise the damage that is being done to their children through the enforced restriction of their diet to cheap "filling" foods, and the lack of more nutritive foods. Replies to the question "What quantities would you buy (that is, of the body-building and protective foods) if you could afford it?"—show that housewives have a very sound idea of dietetics and know the importance, especially for children, of milk, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables.

We believe that the mothers who have taken part in our inquiry are typical of the great majority of working-class mothers, and we can only describe as impertinent and ignorant, statements by individuals with little or no knowledge of working-class conditions, that malnutrition is caused by ignorance of food values and cookery, and unwise buying on the part of housewives. We have received detailed accounts of incredible effort and planning to turn the most unpromising material into palatable and appetising meals. Many mothers would like to have more cooked meals, but cannot, because of the cost of fuel, or gas, and sometimes because of their inability during a long spell of unemployment, to maintain a proper stock

of utensils. The point is frequently made that to buy in small quantities is always more costly, and that cheaper qualities involve more waste and need more time for preparation—so that poverty inevitably means more wasteful buying.

But those who maintain that poor mothers buy unwisely must be reminded that **from the point of view of good health there is no wise way of spending 10/- or 12/- on food if that sum has to provide for five people for a week.** The mother who is compelled to think of how to fill her children's stomachs and appease their hunger, instead of how to build healthy, well-knit bodies, cannot afford to follow the rules of sound nutrition. This is a privilege reserved for those who are more comfortably off.

Rent and other Necessary Expenditure

In any consideration of Food and Income, it is essential to remember the other claims on Income and their relation to the amounts that can be spent on food. Expenditure on food is largely determined by the amount paid in rent, which generally represents a big slice of the income, and is always a first charge on it. (Investigations in Newcastle and Stockton-on-Tees have shown that unemployed families in old slum houses were better fed than similar families in new houses, because food had to be cut down to pay the rent of the new—and healthier —houses).

However far income is cut, something must be allowed for fuel and light, and most mothers try to maintain insurance payments. But other necessaries are severely cut. In many cases nothing is spent on clothes. Some mothers have said that they depend entirely on the help of friends and odd jumble sales for clothes, others that they have had to resort to the "clothing club" system though they know that this means shocking exploitation. The money set aside for childrens' footwear cannot really be well-spent because it is never possible to buy any but inferior shoes. Household replacements as a rule are impossible.

Such facts show the absurdity of complacent official statements to the effect that many mothers appear to be apathetic and homes uncared for, and "parental inefficiency" rather than poverty may therefore be the reason for poor nutrition of the children. Cleanliness is costly—in fuel, materials, utensils, and in human energy, and as household equipment becomes worn, it is more difficult and costly—both in money and energy—to maintain a high standard. The shabbiness which is an inevitable result of prolonged poverty might seem to a casual visitor to be a sign of neglect. Nothing tends to break the health and spirit of the harassed mother more than the knowledge that she cannot replace household gear, that her home is becoming shabby and her children accustomed to a standard of comfort far below what she had once hoped to provide for them; and when at last mental anxiety and physical toil have almost broken her health, it is adding insult to injury to suggest that it is her carelessness or indifference which is responsible for the deterioration in her children's health.

Higher Incomes Necessary

Our inquiry provides further support for the case that Labour women have been arguing for a long time—that poverty means underfeeding; that for the vast majority of working women lack of income is a much more serious handicap than lack of knowledge; that in countless homes domestic standards have been lowered in order to leave as much as possible for food; that where expenditure on other necessaries has been cut to almost nothing, an immediate increase of income could not be spent entirely on extra food; that, therefore, to ensure a proper diet, income should be sufficient to allow an adequate margin for all other needs.

IS THERE A GLUT?

Here, then, is a major social and political problem—to see that those who are going short are provided with food. At present "surplus" stocks of food are destroyed because people are too poor to buy them. World pro-

duction of the most important foodstuffs had been increasing for some years when the depression set in in 1929; but it was the sudden decline in purchasing power, not increased supplies, which brought the slump in prices and the consequent "gluts." The Report on Nutrition and Public Health published last year by the League of Nations points out that "the existence of surplus stocks and over-production in general, at certain moments, in certain countries, does not in any way prove that the world produces too much food, or even enough to meet the needs of its population." If every family in the country were in a position immediately to demand an **optimum** diet—that is, a diet which cannot be improved in any respect—we should be faced for a time with a problem of **under**-production, rather than **over**-production.

GOVERNMENT ACTION AND FOOD CONSUMPTION

Cuts in Wages, etc.

Government action has aggravated the problem. The effect of the "economy cuts" in 1931 is obvious. While certain of the cuts have been restored—e.g., the cuts in wages and standard benefits—the Means Test remains, taking £15 millions per year from the unemployed. There is no doubt that a considerable proportion of that amount would have been spent on food.

Social Services

Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities have power to provide milk and nourishment for expectant and nursing mothers and young children. While no specific instruction was given during the economy campaign to reduce expenditure on this service, there is no doubt that expenditure was restricted in many areas because of the economy drive. At present out of 421 Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities, 398 supply milk free or below cost price to children, while 11 supply milk at cost price. A considerable number of Authorities provide milk for

mothers and some supply meals other than milk. There is wide variation in the methods of determining in what circumstances milk and meals shall be granted.

Section 84 of the Education Act (1921) permits Education Authorities to give free meals to all children who are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of the education provided for them. The clause is permissive, and while it has been adopted by most Authorities it has not really been used. It has been quite common to have a rule that children can be fed only when the doctor reports definite symptoms of malnutrition. In the autumn of 1934 the Government issued instructions (Circular 1437) that this bad rule must become the practice of all Authorities. As a result of widespread protests Circular 1444 was issued in December, 1935, modifying the cruel and stupid policy of " a trial period of starvation " laid down a year earlier.

In March of this year 233 Authorities in England and Wales were providing meals, but this includes the Authorities which give free milk only. There are still 83 Authorities which make no free provision of milk or meals.

It is clear from available figures that in most cases milk only is given. In December last out of a total of 322,878 children in England and Wales who were receiving free meals and milk, 233,257 received milk only, and 89,621 received meals—and of these 42,359 received milk as well as meals. These figures show that the School Meals Clause is being used very inadequately. While the number of Authorities providing meals increased from the year 1933-34 to 1934-35, the number of individual children fed decreased and also the total number of meals provided.

In many areas Public Assistance Committees in assessing the means of applicants for transitional payment took into account the value of meals provided at school, so that mothers had often to choose between school meals and a little extra money. The Government refused to issue any instruction to Local Authorities to ignore school

meals. The Regulations issued in December, 1934, by the Unemployment Assistance Board prescribed that all meals beyond a certain number shall be taken into account in assessing an applicant's needs.

Tariffs and Import Restrictions

The Government's Tariff Schemes include food imports. The effect of food taxes on prices has been largely neutralised by the prevailing low world prices of recent years. But in 1934 housewives paid £19 millions more in food taxes than in 1931. Without the taxes imposed by the National Government, this amount would have been available for additional food, and it is certain that in the lowest incomes groups the money would have been spent on food.

The import duty on butter is 15/- per cwt.; on condensed milk 5/- to 6/- per cwt.; on fresh eggs 1/ -to 1/9 per 120; on tomatoes 1d. and 2d. per lb.; on various fresh fruits ½d. per lb. to 9/4 per cwt.

Since 1932 agreements have been made with various exporting countries—with a bias in favour of Empire countries—for the restriction of imports, on a quota basis, of a number of foodstuffs—bacon and hams; condensed and powdered milk; chilled and frozen beef, mutton and lamb; eggs, wheat and potatoes. In the case of bacon, the anticipated increase in home production did not materialise, and there has been a sharp increase in price. As a result bacon has disappeared from many tables, while the Danish producer is now receiving much more money for much less bacon.

The price of condensed milk has risen as a result of import restriction, hitting the poor housewife who relies on condensed milk because fresh milk is too dear for her.

Wheat Act

The Wheat Act passed in 1932 guaranteed a price of 10/- per cwt. for home-grown wheat, up to a limit of 27,000,000 cwts. in any year—no matter what price the wheat might fetch in the market. The Wheat Commission puts a levy on every sack of flour, both imported

flour, and flour milled in this country from home-grown and imported wheat. The Commission collects the levy from the millers through a Flour Milling Corporation, and distributes the amount among the farmers to cover the difference between the market price and the guaranteed price.

The millers pass the cost of the levy to the bakers and the bakers pass it to the housewife. The Wheat Subsidy represents a tax on bread of over £24 millions in four years which does not appear in the Budget. The 4-lb. loaf has gone up by more than 1d. since 1931, and about half of this increase is due to the levy. There are comparatively few homes where there is a shortage of bread, but an increase in the weekly bread bill cuts down the purchase of other food. On 12 quartern loaves per week the cost of the levy could buy, at present prices, 2 pints milk, 5 eggs, or 10 ozs. New Zealand butter.

Potato Marketing Scheme

This scheme is designed to maintain prices through a manipulation of supplies (a) by limiting the acreage under production, (b) by regulating the size of marketable potatoes, and (c) by controlling imports. Since the inception of the scheme in 1933, the average retail price of potatoes has risen from 5½d. per 7-lbs. in 1933 to 6¼d. in 1934, and 6¾d. in 1935. While there is probably no serious shortage of potatoes in the homes of the unemployed—indeed, many families have too much bread and potatoes, and far too little food of high nutritive value—an increase in the price of potatoes, as of bread, means less to eat of other things.

The Potato Marketing Board made an experiment for 8 weeks in 1935, in Bishop Auckland, of selling " surplus " potatoes to the unemployed at reduced prices. As a result there was a net increase in the consumption of potatoes in the area of 69 per cent. during the period. This is the basis for suggestions that the consumption of potatoes might be increased to a similar extent over the whole of the lower income groups of the population, but such a conclusion is scarcely warranted by the facts. We do

not know, and it would be useful to know, whether the consumption of bread (and flour) was maintained throughout the period, whether potatoes were substituted for bread because of the substantial reduction in price, or whether potatoes were substituted for other foodstuffs because of the urgent need of the amount saved by such substitution for general household requirements.

The official report points out that the experiment did not include any investigation of the influence on the general diet of the additional potatoes consumed, and states

> "General enquiries elicited the almost universal reply that no change had occurred except the additional consumption of potatoes, and in no case was mention made of a reduction of protein foods."

This does not carry us far as the lack of protein foods —especially first-class proteins—in the dietary of the unemployed, allows little margin for reduction. It is far more important to know how far one "filling" food took the place of another. But even if there were little substitution of potatoes for bread, it is not desirable from the point of view of health to increase the consumption of "filling" foods while essential body-building and protective foods are lacking.

The case for stimulating a considerable increase in the consumption of potatoes by the unemployed has not been made; what is proved is that at the lowest income levels, the saving of a few coppers per week in any direction becomes a matter of great urgency.

Beef

The restriction of imports already referred to has not resulted in better prices for the home producer, because home and imported beef compete only to a limited extent. Those who can afford it, buy British beef, but if imports were shut out altogether the market for home beef would not improve while the incomes of the mass of the people remain at the present low level.

Since September, 1934, farmers have received a subsidy from the Exchequer—amounting to £3,674,000 in

the first year—for home produced beef. The housewife who cannot afford British beef is compelled to contribute to a subsidy to maintain its price. Actually, in spite of the subsidy, the home producer is receiving no more than before, because prices have fallen by as much as the subsidy on account of falling demand.

The Government intend to shift the cost of the subsidy from the taxpayer to the buyer of imported beef, by means of a levy on imports. Thus the housewife who buys frozen or chilled beef, not from choice but because British beef is beyond her means, will have to pay to keep it beyond her means.

Milk.

Milk Marketing Boards for England and Wales and for Scotland were set up in the autumn of 1933.

All producers must sell their milk to the Board which supplies distributors and manufacturers, and in conjunction with the distributors' organisations, fixes retail prices and distributors' margins.

The Board operates a pooling scheme—on a regional basis—paying a flat rate to producers in each region for every gallon of milk whether it is sold as liquid milk or for manufacture. Previously the individual producer bore the loss on the "surplus" milk which was sold at an uneconomic price for manufacture. Often he was at the mercy of the well-organised distributors who might sell all their milk as "liquid" milk and pay the farmer only a manufacturing price for part of it.

The producer now receives the same price for every gallon whether it ultimately comes on our tables at 3½d. per pint, or goes to a factory at 3½d. per gallon. The loss on manufacturing milk is thus spread over all the producers. In reality it is the consumers of liquid milk who pay. The price to the housewife was fixed at a figure which would enable the pool to pay a remunerative price to the farmer for **every** gallon of milk, and from the beginning was determined by the existence of a 20 per cent. "surplus" sold cheap for manufacture. In other words, the housewife has been compelled not only

to provide a return to the farmer and a profit to the middleman; she has in addition to carry the factories which are getting their milk at less than it costs to produce it.

The pool price to the producers was attractive enough to increase the supply of milk, and consequently the "surplus" for manufacture. The factories then offered still lower prices. Instead of trying to encourage an increased consumption of liquid milk by pressing for lower retail prices, the Government in the Milk Act of 1934 provided a subsidy from the Exchequer to make up the difference when the price paid by the factories falls below 5d. in summer or 6d. in winter. This enables the pool to maintain the price to the farmer.

The percentage of milk sold by the Boards for manufacture (England and Wales, and Scotland) was 24.7 per cent. in 1933-4, and 32 per cent. in 1934-35.

A system which compels the consumer to subsidise the manufacture of milk to the extent of over 20 per cent, is clearly unfair, and it hits the poor housewife most.

Milk in Schools Scheme

The Milk Act of 1934 also provided £1,000,000 per year to increase the demand for milk, and as a result the milk in schools scheme came into operation in September, 1934. School children are supplied with one-third of a pint per day at a charge of ½d. At the end of March, 1935, 2¾ million children were receiving milk free or for payment (about 300,000 free). In October, 1935, the corresponding figure was 2½ million. But there are still over 2,800,000 receiving no milk, over 50 per cent. of the school population.

The Milk Subsidy has been continued for a further period, but the Government refused to subsidise a more extensive provision of cheap milk for schools, hospitals, etc.

Consumers' Interest Neglected

While some sort of assistance to agriculture was necessary to meet the difficulties of the period of depression, the various measures put into operation during the past

few years have ignored the interests of the consumers, and have created vested interests which will clamour for the continuance of Government props instead of trying to improve the efficiency of the industry.

Further, none of the schemes has made any real attempt to deal with the problem of marketing—except perhaps in so far as the Milk Marketing Board has rescued producers from the chaos previously caused by "surplus" milk. In general, however, present schemes are careful not to interfere with existing methods of distribution; they assume the necessity of maintaining the present costly and complicated distributive structure which stands between producer and consumer, exacting at this point and that a profit for handling commodities (in some cases for merely making book entries), which is ultimately paid by the consumer.

The Milk Marketing Board organises producers in self-protection, but accepts the existing distributive machinery. The Government provides a subsidy to beef producers but makes no effort to deal with the needlessly expensive marketing system in this industry—to cut down the huge transport costs, or to cut out the numerous local livestock markets which provide a field for widespread speculation.

And the Potato Marketing Board embarked on its one small experiment in Bishop Auckland with apologies for daring to injure one part of the population (wholesalers and retailers) to benefit another (the unemployed); and it arranged to compensate the retailers for their losses during the period of the experiment, the compensation it is estimated finally representing an increase in gross profits to the retailers of 23 per cent.! It should be noted that in the area covered, with a population of only 19,000 (it may safely be estimated that such a population has no more than 5,000 households) there were 37 potato retailers.

Briefly it may be said that the object of the various schemes which are being tried—whether by levy, tariff, quota or subsidy, is to maintain producers' prices, and not efficient marketing, nor to serve the housewife.

REVERSE GOVERNMENT POLICY

Government policy over four years has made it more difficult for large numbers of housewives to provide an adequate diet for their families. The Government has overlooked the fact that the difficulties of agriculture have arisen not because too much has been produced, but because too little has been bought; and that the only sound policy is to raise the housewife's income instead of restricting supplies.

There are measures which we should continue to press upon the Government with a view to counteracting the effects of its past policy:

(a) The School Meals Clauses of the Education Act should be made compulsory on all Education Authorities; and Authorities should be asked to provide meals freely on a reasonable income scale.

(b) Inquiry should be made as to the reason why over 50 per cent. of school children do not participate in the Milk in Schools scheme, and where poverty is the cause milk should be given free.

(c) Meals as well as milk should be provided for boys and girls at Juvenile Instruction Centres.

(d) Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities should be asked to use as fully as possible their power to provide milk and dinners for expectant and nursing mothers, and for children below school age.

(e) Meals provided by Education Authorities and Maternity and Child Welfare Committee should not be taken into account by Public Assistance Committees or the Unemployment Assistance Board in assessing the needs of applicants.

(f) Taxes on food should be abolished.

A NATIONAL FOOD POLICY

What is still more urgent is to plan a National Food Policy which will ensure an adequate supply of the right kind of food to every household in the country. This means either cheap food or higher income standards.

Cheap Food or Higher Wages?

The Potato Board's experiment in Bishop Auckland was an attempt to bring prices down to an uneconomic level to meet the needs of families on low incomes. While mass poverty is prevalent there may be a case for similar experiments in particular areas, but we cannot regard this as a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of gluts and underfeeding. It is an extension of the principle of "benefits in kind" to the unemployed, and such a principle is not likely to find general acceptance to-day. If low-paid workers were included—and many of them are as badly off as the unemployed—it would be in effect a subsidy to employers who pay low wages.

Further, we have no right merely to clamour for cheap food without regard to the standard of life of those who produce it. We must be prepared to pay a price for our food which will ensure a decent living to those who work on the land. While more efficient production and marketing will enable us to cut out unnecessary costs, the only sound long-term approach to the problem of raising food consumption to a level consistent with health is to concentrate on raising general standards throughout all sections of workers.

Planning for Health

A National Food Policy to be successful must therefore be part of a general economic policy directed towards raising wage standards. Its special aim will be a healthier community. Questions as to what and how much we should produce at home and what and how much we should buy abroad should be decided in relation to Nutrition after the food requirements of the nation have been estimated, and an effort made to measure the deficiency in consumption of essential foods.

We should concentrate on developing home production of high-grade foods which are essential to health, and which are more valuable and more palatable in fresh natural condition—milk, dairy products, eggs, fruit, vegetables, meat—and should also import sufficient quantities of foodstuffs to make up deficiencies in home production.

There should be no restriction of supplies, so long as supplies are insufficient to meet the nation's food requirements.

Marketing, as well as production, must be planned so as to ensure an efficient and economical distribution of foodstuffs.

Agriculture and the nation as a whole would benefit if home production were deliberately directed towards a greater supply of high-grade "health" foods. Certain proposals which are being considered at present for a great expansion of cereal production in case of war, are not only objectionable in so far as they tend to create a feeling that war is coming, but because such an expansion could only take place at the expense of other, more valuable, commodities, and must inevitably be paid for by the perpetuation of low health standards.

FREE MILK FOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

In view of the special importance of milk for health, it should be considered separately. Milk contains so many of the essential food elements that for children it is an almost perfect food, and it is essential for expectant and nursing mothers.

Inquiry after inquiry—for example, the inquiry last year into milk consumption in the Rhondda—has shown that milk consumption falls from one social class to the next, and that within any working-class group, milk consumption falls, as income **per head** falls—in other words, the more children in the family, the less milk for each. The consumption of milk in this country in all classes is below that of certain other countries—e.g., U.S.A., Sweden, Holland—but consumption in well-to-do homes is far above consumption in poor homes.

A wise nation, realising that milk is as essential as water, would ensure an adequate supply of milk for everyone throughout the period of growth.

Our proposal is that every child should be supplied free of charge throughout the whole of its school life with a pint of milk per day. This should be accepted as part of our educational provision as naturally as books and

other school equipment. The machinery would not be difficult—it could be developed from the existing machinery for the milk in schools scheme. Arrangements could be made for the distribution of milk at week-ends and holidays.

But the foundations of a child's health are laid in the pre-natal period, and we must begin with the expectant mother, the nursing mother and the pre-school child. While in many areas the Maternity and Child Welfare Centres could be used to provide milk for mothers and toddlers, these centres do not yet cover the population adequately and a more satisfactory plan would be to issue a milk card to all expectant mothers, nursing mothers and mothers of young children to enable them to receive milk on presenting the card to a recognised retailer. This free provision should be available to the wives of men who are insured under the National Health Insurance Act, and to insured women, and to mothers who come within the Insurance income limit though they are not insured.

Free provision of milk on this scale would result in a substantial improvement in our health standards: and the cost is not likely to exceed £20 million.

LABOUR POLICY

The Labour Party has an excellent policy for long-term planning of food production and imports. We would urge the Party to give attention to a further elaboration of its policy in relation to present knowledge of Nutrition, with a view to ensuring adequate consumption by the whole population of **body-building** and **protective** foods. We suggest the following points for consideration:

1. A scheme for the provision of milk for mothers and children on the lines suggested above.
2. The planning of increased home production of essential health foods—milk, eggs, fruit, vegetables, dairy produce, meat, fish.
3. In giving effect to the Party's marketing policy, with its plans for Import Boards and Commodity Boards to regulate supplies, the foodstuffs mentioned above should be dealt with first.

4. Investigation of marketing costs with a view to cutting out unnecessary costs and processes, and securing the most economical distribution of food.
5. While income standards of certain sections are still below a proper level, consideration should be given to the best temporary measures to ensure that those sections have adequate food—e.g., through the social services, or by means of subsidies from exchequer to supply food at cheap prices.

If the foregoing proposals were carried into operation, there would follow a substantial improvement in the health and physique of the people. It is idle to expect an eager and virile race of citizens on a basis of malnutrition and disease. The whole of the social services have been organised with a view to maintaining and improving the native quality of the population. Considerable strides have been made; but it is a sad reflection on our social organisation that there should still be a serious volume of malnutrition in our midst, which is eating at the vitals of the nation. This problem of malnutrition must be vigorously attacked so as to rid the country of a grave menace to its welfare. The financial cost might be regarded by some as large, but the continued drain of malnutrition on the health and vitality of the nation represents not only an enormously heavy financial cost in coping with preventable disease, but an irreparable social loss, which the nation cannot afford.

APPENDIX

The following is a summary of the first thousand replies to the questionnaire on Diet and Expenditure on Food. (See pages 13-16).

The replies have been classified as follows:—

1.	Unemployed Households		
	(a) on Standard Benefit	180	
	(b) under Means Test Regulations	296	
			476
2.	Households on Wages		428
3.	Households on Pensions, Public Assistance Allowances, etc. ...		96
			1,000

The classification is not clear-cut in all cases. A minority of households in each of the groups contain more than two adults, and there may be one or two wage-earners in some of the unemployed households, while a household dependent on wages may have to maintain an unemployed member.

1.—UNEMPLOYED FAMILIES.

476 families: 1,186 adults 1,270 children.

(1) Amounts available for FOOD.

Per Head Per week	Standard Benefit. Number of Families.	Adults.	Chldrn.	Means Test. Number of Families.	Adults.	Chldrn.
Below 2/- ...	6	12	16	8	24	16
2/0½ 2/6 ...	16	36	64	36	88	134
2/6½ 3/- ...	38	82	112	92	218	350
3/0½ 3/6 ...	40	86	144	62	162	168
3/6½ 4/- ...	56	136	110	32	110	76
	156	352	446	230	602	744

Per Head Per week		Standard Benefit. Number of Families.	Adults.	Chldrn.		Means Test. Number of Families.	Adults.	Chldrn.
4/0½ 4/6	...	8	24	20	...	28	70	28
4/6½ 5/-	...	6	14	6	...	10	30	6
5/0½ 5/6	...	6	12	4	...	14	40	10
5/6½ 6/-	...	2	4	—	...	4	8	—
6/0½ 6/6	...	—	—	—	...	4	14	6
Over 6/6	...	2	4	—	...	6	12	—
		24	58	30		66	174	50

(2) Proportion below 4/- per head per week for food.

(a) Standard Benefit { 87 per cent. of families / 85 per cent. of adults / 93 per cent. of children } **have no more than 4/- per week.**

The majority in this section have from 3/- to 4/- per head per week.

(b) Means Test { 80 per cent. of families / 77 per cent. of adults / 93 per cent. of children } **have no more than 4/- per week.**

The majority in this section have from 2/6 to 3/- per head per week.

(3) Household Income.

(a) **Standard Benefit.** Of 180 families on Standard Benefit, 30—or 16 per cent.—have some income additional to the husband's benefit—disability pension, old age pension, or wages of another member. The amounts vary from 5/- to 39/- per week. The additional income increases the amount available for food. But of 30 families with income additional to benefit, only 8 belong to the section with over 4/- per week for food.

(b) **Means Test.** Of 296 families on Means Test, 48—or 16 per cent.—have income other than the allowances paid, and such income is, of course, reckoned in determining the allowance.

(4) General.

A comparison of the figures in the "Adults" and "Children" columns shows that the small proportion of households with over 4/- per head per week have comparatively few children.

2. FAMILIES ON WAGES.

428 families: 1,150 adults; 1,080 children.

(1) Amounts available for FOOD.

Per head per week.	Wages vary from	Number of (a) families.	(b) adults.	(c) chldrn.
Below 2/- ...	30/- — 53/3 ...	8	18	48
2/0½ 2/6 ...	30/- — 66/- ...	20	56	98
2/6½ 3/- ...	35/- — 55/- ...	38	94	146
3/0½ 3/6 ...	30/- — 73/- ...	44	106	160
3/6½ 4/- ...	35/- — 66/- ...	52	154	172
		162	428	624
4/0½ 4/6 ...	30/- — 71/9 ...	40	104	114
4/6½ 5/- ...	32/- — 76/- ...	42	106	96
5/0½ 5/6 ...	38/- — 80/- ...	24	64	54
5/6½ 6/- ...	30/- — 64/- ...	28	72	42
6/0½ 6/6 ...	45/- — 80/- ...	16	38	34
6/6½ 7/- ...	37/10 — 79/- ...	14	42	18
7/0½ 7/6 ...	34/- — 80/- ...	24	64	48
7/6½ 8/- ...	39/6 — 80/- ...	16	52	18
Total 4/- — 8/-		204	542	424
8/0½ 9/- ...	60/- — 115/- ...	22	68	16
9/0½ 10/- ...	42/- — 126/- ...	22	60	12
Over 10/- ...	60/- — 87/- ...	18	52	4
Total over 8/-		62	180	32

(2) Proportion below 4/-, and from 4/- to 8/- for food.

37 per cent. of families
37 per cent. of adults
57 per cent. of children
have no more than 4/- per week.

47 per cent. of families
47 per cent. of adults
42 per cent. of children
have from 4/- to 8/- per week.

(3) General.

18 of the families would be better off on unemployment benefit than on wages. These families have all below 4/- per week for food.

It is likely that a number more would be as well off on benefit as on wages, in view of amounts spent on fares to work and wear and tear of clothes while at work.

56 families have some income other than husband's wages. 8 of these families belong to the Section with 4/- or less for food, 44 to the Section with 4/- to 8/-, and 4 to the Section with over 8/-.

A number of replies appear to have lumped together husband's wages and amounts paid by other earning members, so that some at least of the figures of higher wages in the returns represent more than the wages of the householder.

3. FAMILIES LIVING ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, PENSIONS, ETC.

(1) Amount available for FOOD.

Per head per week.	(a) families.	Number of (b) adults.	(c) children.
Below 2/-	10	16	20
2/- 2/6	12	18	20
2/6 3/-	18	34	34
3/- 3/6	16	38	36
3/6 4/-	8	22	12
	64	128	122
4/- 4/6	12	26	8
4/6 5/-	6	14	6
5/- 5/6	4	12	—
5/6 6/-	4	8	2
Over 6/-	6	12	—
	32	72	16

66⅔ per cent. of families
64 per cent. of adults
88 per cent. of children
} **have no more than 4/- per head per week.**

4. TOTALS.

1,000 families: 2,536 adults; 2,488 children.

Numbers at—or under—4/- per head per week for FOOD.

	Families.	Adults.	Children.
Unemployment Benefit ...	156	352	446
"Means Test" Regulations	230	602	744
Families on Wages ...	162	428	624
Pensions, P.A.C., etc. ...	64	128	122
	612	1,510	1,936

That is—61.2 per cent. of families
59 per cent. of adults
78 per cent. of children
} **are at, or under, 4/- per head per week for food.**

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